Addressing the spectator of a 'third world' national cinema: the Bombay 'social' film of the 1940s and 1950s

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Recent discussions of cinema and national identity in the 'third world' context have tended, by and large, to cluster around the concept of a 'third cinema'. Here the focus has been on recovering or reinventing 'national' aesthetic and narrative traditions against the homogenizing impulses of Hollywood in its domination over markets and normative standards. One of the hallmarks of third cinema theory has been its firmly unchauvinist approach to the 'national'. In its references to wider international aesthetic practices, and especially to modernist drives, third cinema asserts but problematizes the boundaries between nation and other. In the process, it also explores the ways in which the suppressed internal others of the nation, whether of class, sub- or counter-nationality, ethnic group or gender, can find a voice.[1]

A substantial lacuna in this project has been any sustained understanding of the domestic commercial cinema in the 'third world'. This is important because in countries such as India the commercial film has, since the dawn of the 'talkies', successfully marginalized Hollywood's position in the domestic market. This is not to claim that it has functioned within an entirely self-referential autarchy. The Bombay cinema stylistically integrated aspects of the world 'standard', and has also been influential in certain foreign markets. But it constitutes something like a 'nation space' against the dominant norms of Hollywood, and so ironically fulfils aspects of the role which the avant-garde third cinema proclaims as its own. Clearly, the difference in language cannot be the major explanation for this autonomy, for

1 For a representative selection of articles, see Jim Pines and Paul Willemen (eds), *Questions of Third Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1989).

2 For the standard account, see
E. Barnouw and S. Krishnaswamy,
Indian Film (London and New
York: Oxford University Press,
1980); also Manjunath Pendakur,
'India', in John A. Lent (ed.), *The
Asian Film Industry* (London:
Christopher Helm, 1990), p. 231.
3 For reflections on the
subordinating implications of
Bombay's national cinema, see
my 'Dislocations: the cinematic
imagining of a new society in
1950s India', *Oxford Literary
Review*, vol. 16 (1994).
4 M. B. Billimoria, 'Foreign markets
for Indian films', *Indian Talkie,
1931–56* (Bombay: Film
Federation of India, 1956),
pp. 53–4. A substantial deposit
of Indian films distributed by
Wapar France, an agency which
catered to North African markets,
are in the French film archives at
Bois d'Arcy. For the importance
of Indian film imports to
Indonesia and Burma, see Lent,
The Asian Film Industry, pp. 202,
223; and for patterns of Indian
film exports at the end of the
1980s, see Pendakur, 'India',
p. 240. The Hindi film's
contribution to the general sense
of subordination of local products
in North Africa and the Middle
East is indicated in the
observation that 'none of these
cinemas [from Morocco to
Kuwait] is doing well . . .
markets are flooded with
Rambos, Karate films, Hindu [sic.]
musicals and Egyptian films'.
Lisbeth Malkmus, 'The "new
Egyptian cinema" ', *Cineaste*, vol.
16, no. 3 (1988), p. 30.

other national cinemas have succumbed to the rule of the Hollywood film. Instead, it is in the peculiarities of the Indian commercial film as an entertainment form that we may find the explanation for its ascendency over the home market.

The formation of a national market for the Bombay cinema was a multi-layered phenomenon. Bombay became ascendent in the home market only in the 1950s. Earlier, Pune in Maharashtra and Calcutta in Bengal were important centres of film production, catering to the Marathi and Bengali speaking 'regional' audience as well as to the Hindi audience which is the largest linguistic market in the country. While these regional markets continued to exist, Bombay became the main focus of national film production. This ascendency was curtailed by the emergence of important industries in Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, producing films in Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam. From the 1980s, these centres produced as many, and often more, films than Bombay.[2] There has been a certain equivalence in the narrative form of these cinemas, but each region contributed its distinctive features to the commercial film. In the Tamil and Telugu cases the cinema also has a strong link with the politics of regional and ethnic identity.

The achievement of the commercial cinema has had ambivalent implications for the social and political constitution of its spectator. All of these cinemas are involved in constructing a certain abstraction of national identity; by national identity I mean here not only the pan-Indian one, but also regional constructions of national identity. This process of abstraction suppresses other identities, either through stereotyping or through absence. The Bombay cinema has a special role here, because it positions other national/ethnic/religious and social identities (it has largely avoided representing the crucial question of caste) in stereotypical ways under an overarching north Indian, majoritarian Hindu identity. The stereotypes of the 'southerner' (or 'Madrasi', a term which dismissively collapses the entire southern region), the Bengali, the Parsi, the Muslim, the Sikh and the Christian occupy the subordinate positions in this universe. Bombay crystallized as the key centre for the production of national fictions just at the moment that the new state came into existence, so its construction of the national narrative carries a particular force.[3]

Indian commercial cinema has exerted an international presence in countries of Indian immigration as in East Africa, Mauritius, the Middle East and South East Asia, but also in a significant swathe of Northern Africa.[4] It has also been popular in the countries of the former Soviet Union and China. Such a sphere of influence makes one think of a certain arc of narrative form separate from, if overlapping at points with, the larger hegemony exercised by Hollywood. From the description of the cultural 'peculiarities' of the Bombay cinema which follows, one could speculate whether its narrative form has a special resonance in 'transitional' societies. The diegetic world of this cinema

5 The term comes from Tom Gunning, 'The cinema of attraction: early film, its spectator and the avant-garde', *Wide Angle*, vol. 8, nos. 3–4 (1986). There is a more elaborate discussion of this term in relation to the Bombay cinema later in this paper. For reflections on other 'attraction' based cinemas see Laleen Jayamanne, 'Sri Lankan family melodrama: a cinema of primitive attractions', *Screen*, vol. 33, no. 2 (1992), pp. 145–53; and Gerard Fouquet, 'Of genres and savours in Thai film', *Cinemaya*, no. 6 (1989–90), pp. 4–9.

6 Nick Browne, 'The spectator of American symbolic forms: re-reading John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*', *Film Reader*, part 5 (1979), pp. 180–88.

is primarily governed by the logic of kinship relations, and its plot driven by family conflict. The system of dramaturgy is a melodramatic one, displaying the characteristic ensemble of manichaeism, bipolarity, the privileging of the moral over the psychological, and the deployment of coincidence. And the relationship between narrative, performance sequence and action spectacle is loosely structured in the fashion of a cinema of attractions.[5] In addition to these features, the system of narration incorporates Hollywood codes of continuity editing in a fitful, unsystematic fashion, relies heavily on visual forms such as the tableau and inducts stable cultural codes of looking of a more archaic sort. Aspects of this picture echo the form of early Euro–American cinema, indicating that what appeared as a fairly abbreviated moment in the history of western cinema has defined the long-term character of this influential cinema of 'another world'. What is required here is a comparative account of narrative forms in 'transitional' societies which might set out a different story of the cinema than the dominant Euro–American one.

In this paper I want to isolate certain aspects of this way of framing the Bombay cinema, focusing in particular on how the spectator of the 'national film' is addressed. I conceive of this as 'an analysis, even if rudimentary, of the position of the spectator within his/her cultural context, within certain large representational and belief systems'.[6] I am using examples from the 1940s and 1950s Hindi social film – the genre used to address the problems of modern life – to explain how the cinema invited the spectator to assume an identity defined along the axis of gender, class and nationhood. I want to do this primarily by identifying the way in which filmic visual culture and narrative form impinge on and shape the subjectivity of the spectator. For a large part of this paper, I will be concerned with the textual constitution of the spectator, but in the final section I will outline the dimensions of a historically significant spectatorial position that developed in the 1940s. I will focus on the way in which prevailing anxieties about the definition of a national identity at the time of the country's independence were reflected in offscreen discourses about actors and directors and how they influenced filmic reception. The popular cinema was involved in mapping a symbolic space which envisaged the national formation as being grounded in certain hierarchies. Here, I lay particular emphasis on the relations between the majority Hindu group and the minority Muslim as it was relayed through film narratives and offscreen discourses.

A dominant paradigm

Before turning to visual and narrative analysis, I want briefly to summarize some of the conventional viewpoints about the commercial film in India and the nature of its spectator. The dominant view is that

7 For an exploration of this influential critical tradition, see my 'Shifting codes, dissolving identities: the Hindi social film of the 1950s as popular culture', *Journal of Art and Ideas*, nos. 23–4 (1993), pp. 51–85.

8 See the collection of essays in Wimal Dissanayake (ed.), *Melodrama and Asian Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

9 For example, Mitsushiro Yoshimoto's account of the postwar domestic criticism of Japanese cinema, 'Melodrama, post-modernism and Japanese cinema' in Dissanayake (ed.), *Melodrama and Asian Cinema*, pp. 101–26, especially pp. 110–11. Thus where late nineteenth-century Europe's discourses about melodrama helped institute a hegemonic class culture, in the context of developing societies, the 'failures' of melodrama are regarded within the imperatives of establishing a modern national configuration. For the class implications of the European context, see Christine Gledhill, *Home is Where the Heart Is: Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), Introduction.

10 Chidananda Das Gupta, *The Painted Face* (New Delhi: Rolly Books, 1991).

11 Das Gupta, 'Seeing is believing', in *The Painted Face*, pp. 35–44.

12 Das Gupta, 'City and village' and 'The Oedipal hero', in *The Painted Face*, pp. 45–58, 70–106.

13 Das Gupta, 'The painted face of Indian politics', in *The Painted Face*, pp. 199–247.

of a tradition of film criticism associated with Satyajit Ray and the Calcutta Film Society in the 1950s. This school of criticism, which has proved influential in subsequent mainstream film criticism, assailed the popular cinema for its derivativeness from the sensational aspects of the US cinema, the melodramatic externality and stereotyping of its characters, and especially for its failure to focus on the psychology of human interaction. In these accounts, the spectator of the popular film emerges as an immature, indeed infantile, figure, one bereft of the rationalist imperatives required for the Nehru era's project of national construction.[7]

Recent analyses of the popular cinemas in the 'non-western' world suggest to me that the melodramatic mode has, with various indigenous modifications, been a characteristic form of narrative and dramaturgy in societies undergoing the transition to modernity.[8] 'National' criticisms of this prevalent mode have taken the particular form that I have just specified, and have had both developmentalist and democratic components. The implication was that, insofar as the melodramatic mode was grounded in an anti-individualist ethos, it would undercut the rational, critical outlook required for the development of a just, dynamic and independent nation.[9]

In the Indian case, this premise of modern film criticism has been taken in rather different directions. The critic Chidananda Das Gupta emerges from the dominant tradition, being one of the founder members of the Calcutta Film Society. His recent book, *The Painted Face*,[10] argues that the commercial film catered to a spectator who had not severed his ties from the countryside and so had a traditional or pre-modern relationship to the image, one which incapacitated him or her from distinguishing between image and reality.[11] Das Gupta also argues that the pre-rationalist spectator was responsive to Bombay cinema's focus on family travails and identity, a focus which displaces attention from the larger social domain. He describes the spectator caught up in the psychic trauma brought about by threatened loss of the mother and the struggle for adult identity as adolescent and self-absorbed or 'totalist'.[12] We have echoes here of the realist criticism of the 1950s in its reference to the spectator of the commercial film as infantile. There is a class component to the psychological paradigm, in which the uprooted, lumpen and working class are regarded as the main audience for the Bombay film. Such a conception of the spectator ultimately has political implications. Das Gupta sees this social and psychic configuration reflecting the gullible mentality that enabled the rise to power of the actor–politicians of the south, M. G. Ramachandran and N. T. Rama Rao.[13] The naive spectator actually believed his screen idols to be capable of the prowess they displayed onscreen. In Das Gupta's view, the rational outlook required for the development of a modern nation state is still lacking, and the popular cinema provides us with an index of the cognitive impairment of the majority of the Indian people.

14 All references are to Ashish Nandy, 'The intelligent film critic's guide to the Indian cinema', *Deep Focus*, vol. 1, nos 1–3 (1987–8); reprinted in Nandy, *The Savage Freud and Other Essays on Possible and Retrievable Selves* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

This psychological and social characterization of the premodern spectator is pervasive, even if it is not used to the same ends as Das Gupta's. The social psychologist Ashish Nandy, while working outside (and, indeed, against) the realist tradition, shares some of its assumptions about the psychological address of the commercial film.[14] Nandy argues that the personality as expressed in Indian culture differed from that conceived by modern western culture. There are two features in his conception of the psychical difference between pre-modern and modern forms in film narratives. For him, the dominant spectator of the popular cinema, caught in 'traditional' arenas of life and work, is quite remote from the outlook of the modern middle class; as such, this spectator is attracted to a narrative which ritually neutralizes the discomfiting features of social change, those modern thought patterns and practices which have to be adopted for reasons of survival. Regressing into a submissive familial frame of reference provides one narrative route for the traumatized spectator. But there is a second, contestatory psychic trajectory. Nandy suggests that Indian culture was defined by androgynous elements which provided the most fertile form of resisting colonial, and more broadly modern, paradigms of progress. He embraces the cultural indices of a *subjectivity which is not governed by the rationalist psychology and* reality orientation of that contested other. In this sense he valorizes that which Das Gupta sees as a drawback.

So a psychical matrix for understanding the address of the commercial Bombay film to its spectator, echoing in some respects the realist criticism of the 1950s, has been extended into the more explicitly psychoanalytical interpretations of spectatorial dispositions and cognitive capacities. Ironically, these premises are shared both by those critical of the commercial film and its spectator for their lack of reality orientation, and those who valorize Indian culture's resistance to modern forms of consciousness. These arguments in turn support different visions of how the relationship between psychology, class and society/nation can give rise to different dynamics of social transformation.

The popular cinema is much more complicated than these criticisms allow. Greater attention has to be paid to the relationship between family and society, between the private and the public, and especially the relations of power within which this subjectivity is produced. For instance, a marked feature of these formulations is the absence of any understanding of patriarchy, of the gendered authority which I will argue *is central to understanding the sociopolitical vision of the* popular film. Film studies in India will have to engage with the terms of identity offered by the cinema, its fantasy scenarios and its norms of authority and responsibility instead of insisting that an 'adult' identity is non-negotiable or, in certain countercultural readings, undesirable. Above all, it will have to look at these questions as ones of cinematic narration.

An Indian melodrama

On the issue of personality construction and its implications for social transformation, a useful point of departure is the elaborate Euro–American theoretical mapping of melodramatic modes of theatre and fiction. It is worth recalling that British theatre exercised considerable influence on the development of the nineteenth-century Indian urban theatre.[15] In Peter Brooks's work,[16] melodrama emerged in the nineteenth century as a form which spoke of a post-sacred universe in which the certainties of traditional meaning and hierarchical authority had been displaced. The melodramatic narrative constantly makes an effort to recover this lost security, but meaning comes to be increasingly founded in the personality. Characters take on essential, psychic resonances corresponding to family identities and work out forbidden conflicts and desires. The family is then positioned as the new locus of meaning. The spectator is addressed through the most basic registers of experience, with the narratives focusing on primal triggers of desire and anxiety. In the process, the social dimension is not displaced, but collapses into the familial and, indeed, the family itself becomes a microcosm of the social level. Melodramatic narratives therefore tend to represent the most significant characters of social life as key familial figures, father, mother and child. It would be a mistake then to categorize these narratives as bounded by the psychic universe of the inward, family-fixated adolescent. That would be to reduce the universe constructed by film narratives to their foundational address.

However, a melodramatic narrative and dramaturgy is also employed in Indian film genres such as the mythological and devotional, not only in post-sacred genres such as the social. To further confound the secular dimensions of melodrama, even in the Bombay 'social', the genre of the modern day, women often employ a traditional Hindu idiom deifying the husband. What implications does this have for melodrama as a so-called post-sacred form?

Narrative structures and strategies are rather more complicated than these religious idioms would suggest. The sociologist Veena Das, in her article on the popular mythological film *Jai Santoshi Ma/Hail Santoshi Ma* (Vijay Sharma, 1975),[17] and the art critic Geeta Kapur, in her analysis of the 'devotional', *Sant Tukaram* (Fatehlal and Damle, 1936),[18] show that the invocation of the sacred is continuous with the reference to non-sacred space, that of the family drama and everyday activity. And Anuradha Kapur's account of the urban Indian Parsi theatre suggests that the discourse of the sacred was subordinated to an emerging discourse of the real through the adoption of realist representational strategies. In her analysis, the representation of the godly through the frontal mode of representation and direct address characteristic of ritual forms is complicated by the integration of these modes into the lateral movement of characters and by features of

15 See R. K. Yagnik, *The Indian Theatre: Its Origins and Later Development under European Influence, with Special Reference to Western India* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1933), pp. 92–117, for accounts of the influence of British melodrama on Indian urban theatre.

16 Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (1976) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

17 Veena Das, 'The mythological film and its framework of meaning: an analysis of *Jai Santoshi Ma*', *India International Centre Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1981), pp. 43–56.

18 Geeta Kapur, 'Mythic material in Indian cinema', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, nos. 14–15 (1987), pp. 79–107.

19 Anuradha Kapur, 'The representation of gods and heroes: parsi mythological drama of the early twentieth century', *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, nos. 23–4 (1993), pp. 85–107.

20 See my ' "You cannot live in society and ignore it": nationhood and female modernity in *Andaz* (Mehboob Khan, 1949)', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (forthcoming).

21 Kumkum Sangari has noted the following effects of the female devotional voice: 'The orthodox triadic relation between wife, husband and god is broken. The wife no longer gets her salvation through her 'godlike' husband . . . *Bhakti* offers direct salvation. The intermediary position now belongs not to the human husband or the Brahmin priest but to the female devotional voice. This voice, obsessed with the relationships between men and women, continues to negotiate the triadic relationship – it simultaneously transgresses and reformulates patriarchal ideologies.' Sangari, 'Mirabai and the spiritual economy of Bhakti', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 25, no. 28 (1990).

22 All references are to Barnouw and Krishnaswamy, 'The Hindi film', in *Indian Talkie*, p. 81.

continuity narrative. The face of the god is in turn stripped of the ornamental features highlighted in ritual drama, and his human incarnation underlined.[19]

As far as the female devotional idiom in socials is concerned, it can paper over the powerful chasms which films open up within the ideology of masculine authority and female submission.[20] The case of the female devotee especially suggests the ambiguities which may lie beneath the invocation of male sacred authority. Feminist critics have noted that it is possible to interpret the female devotional tradition as primarily emphasizing female desire, a strategy which both circumvents patriarchy and reformulates it.[21]

In all these cases, therefore, a complication of the sacred or an outward movement into the secular form is observable. We could say that a melodramatic tendency of failed or uncertain resacralization is also at work here. An Indian melodrama, both as a phenomenon having a direct genealogy with its western counterparts, as well as a larger cultural enterprise concerning the formation of new subjectivities, therefore has a definite existence and historical function. The concept of melodrama, straddling various types of representation and subjectivity, in which sacred and secular, the mythical and the real coexist, will help us get away from a definition of these terms as mutually exclusive. It is the *relay* between the familial, the social and the sacred in the Indian cinema's constitution of its diegetic world which complicates any straightforward rendering of the psyche of the Indian spectator.

Further specifications and distinctions about the spectator need to be made in terms of generic address. While D. G. Phalke inaugurated the popular cinema with the mythological genre, new genres very quickly emerged. These included the costume film, or the 'historical', the spectacular stunt or action-dominated film, the devotional film about the relationship between deity and devotee and, finally, the social film. Our knowledge about the terms in which the industry addressed spectators through genre, and the way spectators received genres, are as yet rudimentary. But a 1950s essay by an industry observer noted that stunt, mythological and costume films would attract a working-class audience.[22] The film industry used two hypotheses to evaluate their audience. Firstly, that the plebeian spectators would delight in spectacle and visceral impact, uncluttered by ideas and social content. Secondly, that such an audience was also susceptible to a religious and moral rhetoric, indicated by their enjoyment of the mythological film. In the industry's view, therefore, the lower-class audience was motivated by visceral or motor-oriented pleasures and moral imperatives. Their susceptibility to the veracity of the image was not an issue in this discussion on attracting an audience.

On the other hand, the film industry understood the devotional and social films, with their emphasis on social criticism, to be the favoured genres of the middle class. However, by the 1950s, the industry

reformulated its understanding of genre and audience appeal. After the collapse of the major studios – Bombay Talkies, Prabhat, New Theatres – the new, speculative climate of the industry encouraged an eye for the quick profit and therefore the drive for a larger audience. This encouraged the induction of the sensational attractions of action, spectacle and dance into the social film, a process explained as a lure for the mass audience.

Industry observers clearly believed the changes in the social film to be quite superficial, the genre label being used to legitimize a cobbling together of sensational attractions. And, indeed, there is something inflationary about a large number of films released in the period 1949–51 being called 'socials'. The label of the social film perhaps gave a certain legitimacy to the cinematic entertainment put together in a slapdash way. However, I will argue that these films did offer a redefinition of social identity for the spectator; the mass audiences earlier conceived of as being attracted only by sensation and themes of moral affirmation were now being solicited by an omnibus form which also included a rationalist discourse as part of its 'attractions'.[23]

Many of the formulations of the dominant paradigm refer to the cinema after the 1950s. Writers such as Das Gupta and Nandy believe that the 1950s was a transitional period between the popular culture and mixed social audience of the 1930s and 1940s and the mass audience emerging from the 1960s. However, I would suggest that the cinema of the 1950s already prefigures some of the dominant methods of the subsequent period, especially in its deployment of a rhetoric of traditional morality and identity to bind its imagining of social transformation. Perhaps it is the focus of these writers on the overt rhetoric of popular narratives that has obscured a certain dynamic in the constitution of the subject which displays dispositions other than the straightforwardly 'traditional'.

Visual codes of narration (I): iconicity, frontality and the tableau frame

Let me now turn to the issue of visual address. For the purposes of identifying the processes of cinematic narration, we have to turn to the Indian cinema's initial formation: a phase, from 1913, in which it not only absorbed religious and mythological narratives, but also certain modes of address. An aesthetics of frontality and iconicity has been noted for Indian films in certain phases and genres by Ashish Rajadhyaksha[24] and Geeta Kapur.[25] This aesthetic arises from mass visual culture, in instances ranging from the relationship between deity and devotee, to the enactment of religious tableaux and their representation in popular artworks such as calendars and posters. When I refer to the iconic mode, I use the term not in its precise semiotic sense, to identify a relation of resemblance, but as a category derived from Indian art-historical writing that has been employed to

23 The reasons for the restructuring of the 'social' film are complex. Artists associated with the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), which had ties with the Communist Party of India, had started working in the film industry from the 1940s. Amongst these were the actor Balraj Sahni, the director Bimal Roy and the scriptwriter K. A. Abbas. The latter was involved in *Awara/The Vagabond* (Raj Kapoor, 1951), a film representative of the new drive to combine a social reform perspective with ornate spectacle. However, the years after independence were characterized by a broader ideological investment in discourses of social justice associated with the image of the new state and the ideology of its first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

24 Ashish Rajadhyaksha, 'The Phalke era: conflict of traditional form and modern technology', *Journal of Art and Ideas*, nos 14–15 (1987), pp. 47–78.

25 Kapur, 'Mythic material in Indian cinema'.

identify a meaningful condensation of image. The term has been used to situate the articulation of the mythic within painting, theatre and cinema, and could be conceived of as cultural work which seeks to bind a multi-layered dynamic into a unitary image. In Geeta Kapur's definition, the iconic is 'an image into which symbolic meanings converge and in which moreover they achieve stasis'.[26]

26 Ibid., p. 82.

Frontal planes in cinematic composition are used to relay this work of condensation and also to group characters and objects in the space of the tableau, a visual figure which, in the Indian context, can be traced to Indian urban theatre's interactions with British melodrama in the nineteenth century. In Peter Brooks's formulation, the tableau in melodrama gives the 'spectator the opportunity to see meanings represented, emotions and moral states rendered in clear visible signs'.[27] And Barthes has noted that it is

27 Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 62.

> a pure cut-out segment with clearly defined edges, irreversible and incorruptible; everything that surrounds it is banished into nothingness, remains unnamed, while everything that it admits within its field is promoted into essence, into light, into view . . . [it] is intellectual, it has something to say (something moral, social) but is also says it knows how this must be done.[28]

28 Roland Barthes, 'Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein', in Stephen Heath (ed. and trans.), *Image, Music, Text* (London: Fontana, 1982), p. 70.
29 Ibid.

In Barthes's argument, the tableau has a temporal dimension to it, a 'pregnant moment' caught between past and future.[29] To my mind, these observations suggest both the highly controlled work involved in the construction of the tableau and also its inbuilt possibilities of dynamization. Its constitution of a frozen dynamic implicitly suggests the possibilities of change. This means that deployment of the tableau frame does not invariably mean indifference to the problem of offscreen space. Dissections of the tableau, cut-ins to closer views on the scene, the use of looks offscreen and character movements in and out of frame serve to complicate the tableau, fulfilling the promise of its reorganization.

I will illustrate the dynamic employment of the frontal, iconic mode, and of tableau framing in a sequence from Mehboob Khan's saga of peasant life, *Mother India* (1957). This segment presents, and then upsets, a pair of relatively stable iconic instances. The mother-in-law, Sundar Chachi, is centred through a number of tableau shots taken from different angles to highlight her authority in the village just after she has staged a spectacular wedding for her son. This representation of Sundar Chachi takes place in the courtyard of her house. The other instance is of the newly-wedded daughter-in-law Radha, shown inside the house, as she submissively massages her husband's feet, a classic image of the devout Hindu wife.[30] The two instances are destabilized because of the information that the wedding has forced Sundar Chachi to mortgage the family land. The information diminishes her standing, causing her to leave the gathering and enter her house. Simultaneously, it also undermines Radha's

30 See a panel from the eighteenth-century Hindu text analysed by Julia Leslie, *The Perfect Wife: the Orthodox Hindu Woman According to the Stridharmapaddhati of Tryambakayajvan* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), for an example of this tradition.

iconic placement as submissive, devout wife. As she overhears the information, the camera tracks in to closeup, eliminating the husband from our view; she looks up and away, offscreen left, presumably towards the source of the information. As the larger space of the scene, the actual relationship between the inside and the outside, remains unspecified, the relationship is suggested by her look offscreen left. The likelihood of this positioning is further strengthened when Sundar Chachi enters the house and, looking in the direction of offscreen right, confesses that she has indeed mortgaged her land. The final shot, a repetition of Radha's look offscreen left, binds the two characters through an eyeline match. The women are narrativized out of their static, iconic position through narrative processes of knowledge circulation and character movement, and by the deployment of Hollywood codes of offscreen sound and eyeline match.

This deployment of tableau and icon is regularly observable in the popular cinema, even if their dispersal and reorganization is not always rendered by such a systematic deployment of the codes of continuity editing. In another, fairly systematic instance, from *Andaz/ Style* (Mehboob Khan, 1949) I have suggested that the particular combination of character-centred continuity narration with the tableau plays off individual and socially coded orientations to the narrative event. The continuity codes highlight individual movement and awareness, and the tableau condenses the space of the social code. Instead of invoking themes of individual/society and modernity/ tradition, I argue that such combinations present the spectator with shifting frames of visual knowledge, different sensoria of the subject.[31] Indeed, rather than attach specific forms of subjectivity to specific modes of representation in a schematic way, I believe that there are instances when certain socially and ritually coded relationships are relayed through what is, after all, the mythicized individuation of the continuity mode. Central here is a particular discourse of the image and the look in indigenous conventions.

31 Vasudevan, 'Shifting codes, dissolving identities', pp. 61–5.

Visual codes of narration (II): looking

While visual codes deriving from mass visual culture are open to the dynamization of the sort I have described, they continue to retain a certain integrity of function, especially in the reproduction of authority structures. For example, hierarchies of power may develop around the image of a character. This character image becomes the authoritative focal point of a scene, occupying a certain privileged position which structures space as a force field of power. In contrast to formulations about looking which have become commonplace in the analysis of Hollywood cinema, the figure looked at is not necessarily subject to control but may in fact be the repository of authority. As Lawrence

32 Lawrence A. Babb, 'Glancing:
visual interaction in Hinduism',
*Journal of Anthropological
Research*, vol. 37, no. 4 (1981),
pp. 387–401.

33 Diana Eck, *Seeing the Divine
Image in India* (Chambersburg:
Anima Books, 1981).

**Devdas (Bimal Roy,
1955). Pictures courtesy:
National Film Archive of India**

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Babb[32] and Diana Eck[33] in their studies of looking in Hinduism have suggested, the operative terms here are *darsan dena* and *darsan lena*, the power to give the look, the privilege of receiving it. However, there may be other functions of looking in play, as when tension arises around the question of who bears authority. The look of the patriarch is privileged in such narrative moves. In a host of 1950s work, from *Awara/The Vagabond* (Raj Kapoor, 1951), *Baazi/The Wager* (Guru Dutt, 1951), *Aar Paar/Heads or Tails* (Guru Dutt, 1954) through the later work of Guru Dutt in *Pyaasa/The Thirsty One* (1957) and *Sahib, bibi aur ghulam/King, Queen, Jack* (Abrar Alvi/Guru Dutt, 1963), the patriarchal gaze is highlighted as a dark, controlling one, seeking to arrest the shift in the coordinates of desire and authority.

In terms of visual address, the residual traces of sacralization are still observable in the reposing of authority in the male image. The family narrative that underpins the Hindi cinema resorts to a transaction of authority around this image. The patriarch gives way to the son, his successor, at the story's conclusion. This male figure's authority is placed in position by the direction of a devotional female regard.

I will cite an example from *Devdas* (Bimal Roy, 1955), a film based on a well-known Bengali novel by Sarat Chandra Chatterjee. Devdas, the son of a powerful landed family, is prohibited from marrying the girl he desires, Parvati, because of status differences. He is a classic renouncer figure of the type favoured in Indian storytelling, a figure who is unable, or refuses, to conform to the demands of society, and wastes away in the contemplation of that which he could never gain. I want to refer to a scene which employs continuity conventions to the highly 'traditional' end of deifying the male as object of desire. The sequence deals with Devdas's visit to Parvati's house, and indicates a strategy of narration whereby Parvati's point of view is used to underline the desirability and the authority exercised by Devdas's image. In this sequence, Parvati finds her grandmother and mother in the courtyard discussing Devdas's arrival from the city and the fact that he has not yet called upon them (fig. 1). Devdas, offscreen, calls from outside the door (fig. 2). From this moment, Parvati's auditory and visual attention dominates the narration. Before we can see Devdas entering the house, we withdraw with Parvati (fig. 3) to her room upstairs, and listen to the conversation taking place below along with her (fig. 4). Devdas announces that he will go to see Parvati himself. In anticipation of Devdas's arrival, Parvati hurriedly starts lighting a *diya*, a devotional lamp, and the melody of a *kirtan*, a traditional devotional song expressing Radha's longing for Krishna, is played. We hear the sound of Devdas's footfall on the stairs, and Parvati's anxiety to light the lamp (figs 5,7,9) before Devdas enters her room is caught by a suspenseful intercutting between her lighting of the lamp and shots of the empty doorway (fig. 6). The doorframe in this sequence suggests the shrine in which the divine idol is housed.

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34 Sangari, 'Mirabai and the
  spiritual economy of Bhakti'.

Devdas's entry is shown in a highly deifying way; first his feet are shown in the doorway (fig. 8), followed by a cut to the lighted lamp (fig. 9). Finally his face is revealed (fig. 10). There follows a cut to Parvati (fig. 11), suggesting that this is the order through which she has seen Devdas's arrival. As she looks at him, in a classical point of view arrangement, conch shells, traditional accompaniment to the act of worship, are sounded. The future husband as deity, object of the worshipful gaze, is established by the narration's deployment of Parvati's point of view. Her lighting of the devotional lamp and the extra-diegetic sound of the *kirtan*, and conch-shells underline the devotional nature of the woman's relationship to the male image. Guru Dutt would use the doorframe to similar effect at the climax of *Pyaasa* and the *kirtan* from *Devdas* is used again on that occasion.

I have already suggested that filmic narration is subject to ambivalence in relaying the image of masculine authority through a desiring female look. Within the *bhakti* or devotional tradition, the female devotee's energy is channelled directly into the worship of the deity, without the mediation of the priest. However, the Lord still remains a remote figure, making of the devotional act a somewhat excessive one, concentrating greater attention on the devotee than the devotional object.[34] Another implication of this arrangement is that we are being invited to identify with the romantically unfulfilled woman character, a problematic position, perhaps, in terms of the gendering of spectatorship.

We need to retain a constant sense of the way the dominant tropes of narration are complicated by such features of excess. However, I still think it is necessary to acknowledge the framework of masculine authority within which female desire is finally held. And I suggest that we need to go back to the tableau and the framework of seeing provided by an iconic frontality to understand the ways in which the elaboration of filmic narration is determined by these imperatives.

In *Pyaasa* there is a scene in which the poet–hero, Vijay, refers to the prostitute, Gulab, as his wife in order to protect her from a policeman who is pursuing her. The prostitute is unaccustomed to such a respectful address, especially one suggestive of intimate ties to a man she loves, and is thrown into a sensual haze. Vijay ascends a stairway to the terrace of a building where he will pass the night. Gulab sees a troupe of devotional folk singers, *Bauls*, performing a song, *Aaj sajan mohe ang laga lo* (Take me in your arms today, O beloved), and follows Vijay up the stairs. The *baul* song is used to express Gulab's desire, and cutting and camera movement closely follow its rhythms. The scene is structured by these relations of desire, which are simultaneously relations of distance, as the woman follows, looks at and almost touches the man she loves (who is entirely unaware of all this) but finally withdraws and flees as she believes herself unworthy of him.

The relation between devotee and object of devotion determines the

space of this scene, it remains the structuring element in the extension and constraining of space. The relationship here is not that of the iconic frontality of traditional worship. The desired one is not framed in this way, for continuity codes dominate the scenic construction. Even in the scene I have cited from *Devdas*, continuity codes construct space and it is a shot/reverse shot relationship which defines the ultimate moment of looking. Nevertheless, if we think of the male icon as the crucial figure towards and from which the narration moves, we can see how a 'traditional' marker of authority and desire is the anchor to the spatializing of narrative. We have here something akin to a tableau constructed over a series of shots, its constituent elements – Gulab, Vijay and the performers – being ranged in a relatively consistent spatial relationship to each other. From the point of view of the male spectator, what is being underwritten is not, or not only, the subordinate position in the act of looking, it is a moment which uses looking to relay his own desirability to him.

The sociopolitical referent

The relaying of patriarchal authority through reorganized tableaux, the transfer of the authoritative image from one character to another, and the presence of an empowering female look, present the essential visual–narrational transaction. In this sense there is a certain rearticulation of traditional authority and hierarchies of the visual culture into the narrational procedures of the cinema. Hollywood codes of narration, oriented to generate linear narrative trajectories motivated by character point of view and action are employed. But what is of interest is that they are used to 'enshrine' the male character in the female look as I have described, or to route the male character back to an original family identity. This latter narrative trajectory is widely observable in the series of popular crime films of the 1950s, such as *Awara, Baazi, Aar Paar* and *CID* (Raj Khosla, 1956). This circularity has something to do with the particular structures of the family narrative in the 1940s and 1950s. Something akin to a Freudian family romance was at work, in which the fantasy that the child has parents other than those who bring him up is played out. In the Hindi social film, instead of a fantasy of upward mobility, a democratizing downward spiral is set in motion, the hero being precipitated into a life of destitution and crime. The circling back, the recovery of identity, is then tied to a normalization of social experience, a recovery of the reassuring coordinates of social privilege.[35]

    As a result, in line with dominant ideological currents in the wake of independence, the social film of the 1950s expanded the terms of social reference, urged an empathy towards social deprivation and invited a vicarious identification with such states. But the recovery of

35 For an elaboration of this narrative structure, see my 'Dislocations'.

the hero at the conclusion finally underlines the middle-class identity that structures the narrative. However, certain shifts are observable in the nature of family narrative and the recovery of identity. In socials of the 1940s such as *Kangan/The Bracelet* (Franz Osten, 1940) and *Kismet*, there is a proper reconciliation between son and father, and a type of joint family structure seems to be back in place. By the 1950s, however, the hero's recovery of identity and social position does not result in reconciliation with the father, but the positing of a new family space. This nuclear family is formed in alignment with the state, as if politics and personality were allied in a common project of transformation.

Indeed, while I have tried to suggest the ways the popular film seeks to integrate new forms of subjectivity into more conventional tropes, it is important that we retain the signs, however fragmentary, of other subjectivities in play, whether these express the drives of individualized perception, of an assertive masculinity, or the recovery of the popular conventions of female devotion. I have suggested elsewhere, in a study of *Andaz*, that the popular cinema of this period drew upon Hollywood narrative conventions in order to highlight the enigmatic dimensions of its female character's desires. The film was notable for its use of hallucinations and dreams to define the heroine in terms of an ambivalent psychology and as agent of a transgressive but involuntary sexuality. Such conventions were drawn upon to be contained and disavowed. A nationalist modernizing imperative had to symbolically contain those ideologically fraught aspects of modernity that derived from transformations in the social position and sexual outlook of women. The result was a fascinatingly perverse and incoherent text, one whose ideological achievements are complicated by the subjectivities it draws upon.[36]

36 Vasudevan, ' "You cannot live in society – and ignore it" '.

A 'national' spectator

The terms of cinematic narration I have sketched here are rather different from the notions of spectatorship which have emerged from that model of the successful commodity cinema, Hollywood. Historians and theoreticians of the US cinema have underlined the importance of continuity editing in binding or suturing the spectator into the space of the fiction. The undercutting of direct address and the binding of the spectator into a hermetic universe onscreen heightens the individual psychic address and sidelines the space of the auditorium as a social and collective viewing space. This very rich historiography and textual analysis[37] speaks of the fraught process through which US cinema's bourgeois address came into being. This work describes how social and ethnic peculiarities were addressed in the relation between early cinema and its viewers. The process by which the cinema took over and came to develop its own

37 See Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); and Thomas Elsaesser (ed.), *Early Cinema: Space-Frame-Narrative* (London: British Film Institute, 1990).

entertainment space was a process of the formation of a national market in which the spectator had to be addressed in the broadest, non-ethnic, socially universal terms. Of course, what was actually happening was that a dominant white Anglo-Saxon norm came to be projected as universal. Along with this process, there developed the guidelines for the construction of a universal spectator placed not in the auditorium but as an imaginary figure enmeshed in the very process of narration.

The mixed address of the Hindi cinema, along with the song and dance sequences and comic skits which open up within the commercial film, suggests a rather different relationship of reception. Indeed, it recalls the notion of a 'cinema of attractions', a term developed by Tom Gunning to theorize the appeal of early Euro–American cinema.[38] In contrast to the Hollywood mode of continuity cinema or narrative integration, Gunning argues that early cinema was exhibitionist. The character's look into the camera indicated an indifference to the realist illusion that the story tells itself without mediation. The films displayed a greater interest in relaying a series of views and sensations to their audience rather than following a linear narrative logic. These elements were to be increasingly transcended in the Hollywood cinema's abstraction of the spectator as individuated consumer of its self-enclosed fictional world. In the process, the audience, earlier understood to be composed of workers and immigrants, was 'civilized' into appreciating the bourgeois virtues of a concentrated, logical, character-based narrative development.[39]

Elements of this formulation of a cinema of attractions are clearly applicable to the Bombay film. But the Bombay cinema too was engaged in creating standard, universalizing reference points. To understand the processes by which the Hindi cinema acquired certain acceptable 'national' standards, we have to be able to identify how it took over certain widespread narrational norms from the past. But alongside this, we also need to examine how it was involved in constructing certain overarching cultural norms that suppressed the representation of marginal currents in Indian narrative and aesthetic traditions.

Research into the urban theatre of the nineteenth century will provide one point of entry into the understanding of the process by which narrational norms were transmitted to the cinema. This theatre presaged the cinema in its negotiation of western form, of technology, of narrative, even of a notion of entertainment time.[40] But it was also reputedly a great indigenizer, appropriating other traditions into Indian narrative trajectories. One narrational function that was carried from the theatre was that of a narratorial position external to the story, reminiscent of the *sutradhar* or narrator of traditional theatre. The comic, or *vidushak*, also left his mark as one of the staple figures of the commercial cinema.[41] Here he sometimes plays the role of a narrator external to the main narrative and is often engaged in a

38 Gunning, 'The cinema of attraction'.

39 Hansen, *Babel and Babylon*, chapters 1 and 2.

40 A. Yusuf Ali, 'The modern Hindustani drama', *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature*, vol. 35 (1917), pp. 89–90.

41 For an account of the *sutradhar* and the *vidushak*, see M. L. Varadpande, *Traditions of Indian Theatre* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1978), pp. 84–5; also David Shulman, *The King and the Clown in South Indian Myth and Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

relationship of direct address to the audience. There is a certain didacticism involved in his functions. In a more commonplace function, it is the very absurdity of the comic figure, quite obviously opposed to the larger-than-life attraction of the hero, which invites a less flattering point of identification for the audience, and thereby a certain narratorial distance towards the story. Further, in the very superfluity of his functions, we could say that the comic was the spokesman within the story for a different order of storytelling, one which celebrates the disaggregative relationship to narrative.

But the main repository of such a narratorial externality to the main story and its process of narration is what I would term the 'narrational song'. This is enacted by a source other than any of the fictional characters. Through such a song, we are offered an insight into the emotional attitude of individual characters and the wider cultural and even mythic significance of certain actions and events. For example, when Devdas leaves Parvati in Bimal Roy's *Devdas*, Parvati listens to *Baul* singers as they sing of Radha's sorrow at Krishna's departure. This is a direct representation of her mood, but in addition to emotional attitudes, the song also represents a highly conventionalized cultural idiom.

The embedding of such cultural idioms offers us a stance, quite ritualistic in its intelligibility, towards the development of the narrative. We are both inside and outside the story, tied at one moment to the seamless flow of a character-based narration from within, in the next attuned to a culturally familiar stance from without. This may not be a simple, normative move on the part of the narration; indeed, we may be offered a critical view on narrative development. Significantly, such culturally familiar narratorial stances are sometimes separate from the space of the fiction. Not only are they performed by characters otherwise superfluous to the main storyline, there is often also an actual disjunction between the space of the story and that of the narrator. In this sense, the narrational song can be identified with the properties of the extra-fictional music used on the soundtrack. They both inhabit a space outside the fiction and alert us to a certain point of view or emotional disposition which we find culturally intelligible.

The disaggregation of address in Hindi cinema, such as is found in the external narrator and the comic and musical sequence, therefore integrates with a recognizable set of conventions. Further, the Bombay cinema also generates an enlarged and standardized identity across these divergent points of address. This can be located in this cinema's construction of masculine authority and its privileging of a symbolic Hindu identity. The outlines of such a masculine subjectivity were accompanied by a sharper delineation of sexual difference than that within the original cultural idiom. The androgynous aspects of Krishna's sexual identity are marginalized by fixing the male position as the object of sensual female regard and devotion.[42] For all the

42 This can be seen as part of an epochal refactioning of Krishna, suggestively presented in Nandy, 'The intelligent film critic's guide'.

43 Uma Chakravarty, 'The development of the Sita myth: a case study of women in myth and literature', *Samya Shakti*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1983), pp. 68–75; also Paula Richman (ed.), *Many Ramayanas: the Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).

44 Patricia Uberoi, 'Feminine identity and national ethos in Indian calendar art', *Economic and Political Weekly*, women's studies section, vol. 25, no. 28 (1990), pp. 41–8.

richness of its ambiguous use of female desire and its unconventional articulation of the hero's masculinity, Guru Dutt's *Pyaasa* is quite clear about the imperative of fixing a masculine locus of authority in its conclusion. Perhaps we have here a symbolic nationalist reformulation of culture in the cinema, undercutting the space for marginal discourses, and seeking to control ambiguity in the relationship between gender and power. Historians such as Uma Chakravarty have shown how this takes place in revisions of the Ramayana,[43] and Patricia Uberoi has suggested that a similar process, aligned to high-caste images of women as subordinate, self-effacing and motherly, took place in the culture of the calendar print.[44] These patterns may help us identify the universalizing ambition of the Hindi cinema, despite its disaggregative features. The scope of universalization lies not merely in the subordination of all elements to narrative, but in ensuring that multiple and tangential tracks never exceed the limits of the dominant address. This implies that the concept of the cinema of attractions needs to be rethought when it becomes the characteristic, long-term feature of a national commodity cinema.

Identifying a contextual address to the spectator

In the last part of this paper, I want to refer to a more historically specific address through which a symbolic identity was negotiated by the cinema. I will argue that, although the language of the Bombay cinema is Hindustani and therefore the product of cultural interaction between Muslim and Hindu culture, the spectator of the commercial cinema is primarily positioned in relation to the overarching Hindu symbolic identity relayed through the cinema. This is effected through the types of cultural address which I have described, through narrational song, gender idiom and modes of visual address. The strongly Hindu cultural connotation of these features is so pervasive that it is invariably thought of as the norm, rather than as a historically specific project for spectatorial identification. In the early 1940s, however, the industry became much more self-conscious about its market, and how it was to be addressed. In making this observation, I am merely sketching out certain guidelines for research rather than laying out the definite time scale and the range of resources used to put together the symbolic narrative of the Hindu nation. Preliminary findings suggest the importance of this line of enquiry.

In 1937, the All India League for Censorship, a private body, was set up to lobby for stringent measures in regard to what was perceived to be an anti-Hindu dimension in the film industry.[45] It claimed that the industry was dominated by Muslims and Parsis who wanted to show the Hindus 'in a bad light'. Muslim actors and Muslim characters were used, it declared, to offer a contrast with Hindu

45 All references are taken from Bombay, Home Department, Political file no. 313/1940, Maharashtra State Archives.

characters, portrayed as venal, effete and oppressive. The League evidently assumed that the government of Bombay, led by the Indian National Congress, would be responsive to their demand that certain films be banned for their so-called anti-Hindu features. Such expectations were belied by K. M. Munshi, Home Minister in the Bombay Government, who dismissed the League as bigoted. Indeed, this was how the League must have appeared at the time. But their charges do bring to light the fact that certain offscreen information, that is, the religious identity of producers, directors and actors, was being related to the onscreen narrative, and in fact was seen to constitute a critical social and political level of the narrative.

It is against this background that we should situate the as yet rudimentary information which suggests that in the next decade the industry itself was coming to project an address to its market which clearly apprehended and sought to circumvent Hindu alienation. Syed Hasan Manto, who had written scripts for Hindi films, recalled that he was pressurized to leave his job in the early 1940s because he was a Muslim. Indeed, Bombay Talkies, the studio for which Manto worked from 1946 to 1948, came under threat from Hindu extremists who demanded that the studio's Muslim employees be sacked.[46] At a more symbolic level, a process seems to have been inaugurated by which the roles of hero and heroine, which normally remain outside the purview of stereotypes associated with other characters, had to be played by actors with Hindu names. In 1943, when Yusuf Khan was inducted as a male lead by Devika Rani at Bombay Talkies, his name was changed, as is well known, to Dilip Kumar. In the actor's account, the change was quite incidental.[47] But we have information about other Muslim actors and actresses who underwent name changes, such as Mahzabin, who became Meena Kumar,[48] and Nawab, who became Nimmi;[49] and, in 1950 a struggling actor, Hamid Ali Khan changed his name to Ajit on the advice of the director, K. Amarnath.[50] I am sure that this short list is but the beginning of a much longer one, and an oral history might uncover something akin to a parallel universe of concealed identities. The transaction involved seems to have been purely symbolic. Evidence from film periodicals suggests that the true identity of such actors was mostly well known, and yet an abnegation of identity was undertaken in the development of the star personality. It is as if the screen, constituting an imaginary nation space, required the fulfilment of certain criteria before the actor/actress could acquire a symbolic eligibility.

Following in the tracks of the Hindu communal censorship League of 1937, *Filmindia*, the sensationalist film periodical edited by Baburao Patel, showed that a bodily sense of communal difference had come to inflect a certain reception of film images. *Filmindia*, incensed in 1949 when demonstrations prevented the screening of *Barsaat/Monsoon* (Raj Kapoor, 1949) in Pakistan,[51] was delighted to see two Muslim actresses, Nimmi and Nargis, kiss the feet of

46 See the introduction to Saadat Hasan Manto, *Kingdom's End and Other Stories*, trans. Khalid Hasan (London: Verso Books, 1987).

47 *Filmfare*, 26 April 1957, p. 77.

48 *Filmfare*, 17 October 1952, p. 19.

49 *Filmfare*, 28 November 1952, p. 18.

50 Ajit, interviewed by Anjali Joshi, *Sunday Observer*, Delhi, 16 December 1991. For some ideas about the onscreen ramifications of Hamid Ali Khan's change of name, see my 'Dislocations'.

51 *Filmindia*, April 1950, p. 13.

52 *Filmindia*, May 1950, p. 18.

Premnath and Raj Kapoor in the latter's *Barsaat*. In an ironic aside, the gossip columns of the periodical suggested that, to balance this act of submission, a Muslim director such as Kardar should now arrange to have a Hindu actress kiss Dilip Kumar's feet. Clearly, it was understood that such an inversion was not a likely scenario, and a vicarious pleasure was being taken in this symbolic triumph.[52] How much of these offscreen discourses actually went into the structuring of onscreen narratives? It seems to me no coincidence that in the same year in which *Filmindia* carried this dark communal reception of *Barsaat*, in *Andaz*, a film by a Muslim director Mehboob, Nargis should again be seeking to touch Raj Kapoor's feet, desperate to demonstrate her virtue as a true Indian wife, and to clear herself of charges of being involved with Dilip Kumar. The image of the star is not just reiterated in this interweaving of on- and offscreen narratives; there is an active working out and resolution of the transgressive features which have come to be attached to him/her. For example, speculations about Nargis's family background and suspicions of her chastity following her affair with Raj Kapoor seemed to repetitively feed into, and be resolved within, a host of films from *Andaz* to *Bewafa/Faithless* (M. L. Anand, 1952), *Laajwanti/Woman of Honour* (Rajinder Suri, 1957) and *Mother India*.[53]

53 For further reflections about Nargis's career, see Rosie Thomas, 'Sanctity and scandal in *Mother India*', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, vol. 11, no. 3 (1989), pp. 11–30; and Vasudevan, ' "You cannot live in society – and ignore it" '.

The way in which this symbolic space was charted out by the Hindi commercial cinema is comparable to the way in which the white hero became the norm for the US commercial cinema and, preeminently, his WASP version. In both cases, the ideological construction of this space appears to be neatly effaced, but the discourses surrounding the films clearly indicate that this was not so.

In this symbolic space, the minorities too can have a presence, usually as subordinate ally of the Hindu hero. But we must not forget the specific address the industry made to the Muslim community in the form of the Muslim social film. Unfortunately, I have not seen enough of these to be able to situate them adequately within or against the grain of Hindu nationhood. *Elaan/Announcement* (Mehboob Khan, 1948) falls into this category, and it clearly urges the Muslim community to emulate its educated sections and pursue the path of modernization. Perhaps the pejorative and ideologically loaded implication of this specific address was that the wider society, comprising the Hindus, had already made this advance.

Conclusion

I have suggested that we must situate the whole project of the Hindi commercial cinema in its cultural context, that of a mass visual culture which displays certain rules of address, composition and placement. Through the deciphering of this system, we shall be able to understand the position given to the spectator, the types of identity he or she is

offered. This starting point will enable us to hold on to the historical spectator as he/she is moved through regimes of subjectivity set up by generic and social address, and by the integration of a new dynamic of narration from the Hollywood cinema. In citing these imperatives of analysis, I seek to problematize a dominant paradigm in Indian criticism. This has focused on the particular familial rhetoric of the popular cinema to suggest that its address disavows the 'real' and reflects significant cognitive and political dispositions in its spectator. In a word, this is a disposition which seeks to counter a rational outlook, seen by the popular cinema's critics as the basis of a modern society and nation state; in certain anti-modern interpretations, such failings may actually constitute a virtue.

In contrast, in my reading of cinematic narratives, we can observe the refashioning of the spectator in accordance with certain new compulsions, a streamlining of narrative form around the drives of individualized characters. Instead of an unqualified assimilation of such drives, the transformation is held within a culturally familiar visual economy centred on a transaction around the image of male authority. But there are always excessive aspects to this process of cultural 'domestication', and we need to retain a sense, however fragmentary, of the range of subjectivities which are called into play by the negotiatory features of narrative construction.

The Hindi cinema displays a disaggregative address in its structures, quite in contrast to the narrative integrity and spectatorial enmeshing of another successful commodity cinema, that of Hollywood's classical narrative cinema. However, I have argued that despite this a coherence can be discerned in the limits set by dominant discourses to otherwise diverse narrative and performative strands. Even disaggregation, I have suggested, has certain binding features in the way it articulates the spectator to earlier practices of narration and to many points of cultural institution and investment. In other words, it performs a symbolic remapping of identity and suppresses other more complicated traditions of gender, of Hinduism and other forms of culture. It is through this process of standardization that the cinema constitutes an enlarged, transcendent identity for its spectator.

Finally, I have suggested that, from the 1940s, contextual information gleaned from discourses about the cinema indicated that such a 'national' project was yoked to constructions of the Indian nation as one dominated by the Hindu, and was arrived at through symbolic transactions of offscreen identity and onscreen narrative.